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->From the Editor's Keyboard  
"\*\*\*\*\*"

"Saying it like it is!"

I apologize for this week's issue hitting the streets and your mailboxes late this week. I had an opportunity to get together with a couple of friends that I've known since childhood, with their wives, for a late dinner. I haven't seen these guys for five years, at one's wedding. One friend, who moved to California about 20 years ago, was in the area with his wife and son to check out colleges in the area. The other guy lives in New Hampshire, and it's been awhile. So, even though my wife and I were exhausted, we felt that this opportunity doesn't occur too often. So, we all met in a northeast Massachusetts tourist-trap coastal town for dinner and a couple of drinks. Enjoyable, but a quick night. We're going to try again soon, if enough common events come about!

So, I'm going to beg off my commentary this week because it's really late. Suffice it to say that the focus of my comments are based on the large number of stories that appear in this issue surrounding net neutrality. It appears that Verizon and Google have "joined forces" to push a net neutrality plan.

I don't usually put more than a couple of articles in any one issue that relate similar news stories, but this topic deserves to be fully viewed, and as much information as possible be brought to the forefront. So, take a look-see at the various articles and see if you'll come out with the same conclusions that I've considered. Meanwhile, I'll work on my own comments and relate them to you next week.

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING  
compiled by Joe Mirando  
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, another week has come and gone, and there's not a heck of a lot to talk about in the NewsGroup.

So what have we got? The Gulf oil spill? No, the well has been capped and

there is currently no oil gushing from it, there's no news about the environmental effects that are sure to eventually hit us, there are no big storms in the Gulf right now to "swish" the petroleum around and mix things up and make the cleanup interesting, and nobody seems to want to talk about the thousands of people whose lives and livelihoods are affected by this disaster. Yeah, you see heartrending bits on the evening news, but there's always much more behind the scenes than there's time for during the broadcast. And what about the health issues associated not only with cleaning up the mess, but issues with living in the area; making a living on the water with the crude oil and methane and massive amounts of dead and decaying matter that's bound to be there for at least a while longer?

The spill has been called the worst man-made disaster ever, and I don't know if that's really the case... yet. I mean, yes, we have just poured more raw crude oil into the Gulf than has ever happened before, and there will surely be repercussions for a long time to come: The dead flora and fauna in the water, the possible loss of several species, loss of the associated wetlands and the living things there, the health issues, the cost of the cleanup, what to do with the millions of gallons of oil and denatured 'gunk' (what do you do with what's left after all the volatiles have been leached from crude oil?), how to go about deciding what gets cleaned up first, etc., the best way to go about restoring what we can, and what to tell ourselves about the 'stuff' that we can't remove or fix or cover over.

Another issue is going to be getting people back to work in an already faltering economy. There is a large cottage industry springing up right now; people going to work cleaning up after BP. That includes fishermen who can't make a living at the moment in the Gulf who are now lending their strength to skimming oil slicks and deploying booms and collecting up turtles and pelicans and whatever else needs to be done. I haven't heard any concrete information on this, but I'd be willing to bet that most of them aren't making enough money to cover the cleaning of their boats after skimming through those slicks.

There are also other professionals involved: Lawyers (of course), 'experts' employed by states, the federal government and BP itself, ranging in expertise from petroleum cleanup and testing of everything from water quality to the fitness of seafood for sale to health issues. There are probably several more disciplines involved that neither you nor I have even begun to think of yet, but they're there, doing what they can to not only make things better, but to make a living.

The "rebound" is going to hit for these folks when the television cameras dim and the reporters turn in their hotel room keys and the corporate bigshots go back to Houston and New York and wherever else. As reporting and interest in the spill wane and the jobs disappear, these people are going to start finding it hard to jump from one job to another, mostly because there will be fewer jobs to jump to. If the economy in general hasn't 'bounced back', these folks are going to find it incredibly hard... again.

Let's focus on the fishermen for a moment. Many of them count on seasonal catches to provide them with income for the entire year. That includes not only putting food on the table, but paying the mortgage and maintenance and upkeep on equipment. Some will lose their boats, some will sell theirs to whoever will/can buy them, but almost certainly at a loss. I mean, who's going to pay full price for a fishing boat in the Gulf right now with the moratorium on fishing? So even if things do get back to normal along the Gulf coast, it's going to be an uphill battle to just get back to where

you were before the disaster.

Some will move on and move away, go on to other professions where they can, subsist on whatever they can find, or live on the kindness of relatives. We're seeing that already; people being forced to move away because they can no longer make a living doing what they used to do.

I have no doubt but that the Gulf region will rebound. There are simply too many rich people around who want their summer houses and beach-front property as it was, and they want the ease of having all their associated conveniences around them. No, this is not a "bash the rich" rant. It's simply a statement of fact. They'll make things better for themselves, either by pouring their own money into it or, more likely, getting the government to pour our money into it. And that's not altogether a bad thing. It has to be done regardless, and if someone with a high financial profile get the ball rolling.

While I've never been a fan of the trickle-down theory or supply-side economics, we do need to get things going somehow.

So far I've talked mostly about the concrete costs to the 'human condition', but there are other issues we need to at least consider as well. I mentioned the possibility of 'losing' several species. Species like the brown pelican, several types of sea turtles (yes, picture Mr. Gibbs smiling and saying "Aye, sea TURTLES"), and who knows about the other forms of sea life like the blue fin tuna, and all that delicious shrimp. While I've mentioned only the creatures that are interesting to us (either because they're cute or they taste good), there are bound to be many others just as deserving of a place in the Gulf, From sharks and all kinds of fish all the way 'down' to the lowly plankton upon which the whole system depends.

And what if, horror of horrors, the damage from this catastrophe gets carried around Florida and into the Atlantic? Sure it might get diluted and spread out and be no major trouble to anyone, but it could also fowl the water, poison feeding and breeding grounds, and make survival tough on both wildlife and any hapless human who needs to make their living from them. And imagine the international implications. It's bad enough that there's a chance that the spill could impact not only American states, but most of the countries on the east coast of North and Central America, not to mention the very slim possibility of it somehow impacting countries in South America. Can you imagine how Venezuela would react to having its coastline mucked up by someone else's oil company?

But above and beyond all that, I wonder if we've learned anything from all of this. Perhaps.. just perhaps we can salvage something from this disaster if we learn something from it. Perhaps something about how mechanical equipment reacts under the tremendous pressure of having a mile of water above, perhaps something about following safety guidelines no matter what, perhaps maybe we'll even learn something about ourselves... about conserving where we can and working smarter instead of simply adding more coal (or more oil) to the fire to get more, more, more energy. Well, here's hoping.

Well, that's it for this week, friends and neighbors. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News      -    The Latest Gaming News!  
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# Nintendo Wii Sells 30 Million Units

Nintendo said Wednesday that the company has sold 30 million of its Nintendo Wii gaming consoles in the U.S. alone 45 months after its launch in Nov. 2006, making it the fastest-growing console in history.

The Nintendo Wii, lacking the graphical horsepower of the rival Sony Playstation 3 or Microsoft Xbox 360, has been priced to move, at \$199.99.

That, in turn, has led to record holiday sales and numerous instances of shortages early in the console's life. In part, Nintendo said that's because the console appealed to a diverse audience.

"More than any other video game system in history, Wii has expanded the world of video games to new audiences," said Cammie Dunaway, Nintendo of America's executive vice president of Sales & Marketing. "This milestone is another reminder that people want fun games they can play with others - all at a value-minded price."

Nintendo said the company's holiday game lineup included Metroid: Other M on Aug. 31, Samurai Warriors 3 on Sept. 27, Kirby's Epic Yarn and Wii Party this fall, and Donkey Kong Country Returns, FlingSmash and Pok^Park Wii: Pikachu's Adventure for the holidays. That's in addition to New Carnival Games from 2K Play in September, NBA JAM from EA Sports in October, GoldenEye 007 from Activision and Just Dance 2 from Ubisoft this fall, and Disney Epic Mickey from Disney Interactive Studios and Sonic Colors from SEGA during the holidays.

According to NPD, the top three games for the console through June are Wii Play, Mario Kart Wii, and Wii Fit, with the Wii Balance Board accessory.

'Madden NFL 11' Not Perfect, Still Best

The 22-year-old Madden NFL video game franchise returns with another championship-caliber effort, capturing the Vince Lombardi trophy but falling short of the cherished undefeated season.

EA Sports, which is owned by Electronic Arts Inc., once again finds a way to up the series' incredible visuals and Sunday experience, and developers have made running fun again while adding a great new play-calling mode to speed up the time it takes to get through a game.

But "Madden NFL 11" (\$59.99; Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3) is held back a bit by disjointed play-by-play announcing that is hard to ignore.

Football teams are most effective when they can establish the run, and EA Sports comes through here.

The game scraps the long-used sprint button (why would you not want to go fast?) in favor of a dual-stick control that makes juking and spinning toward the goal line more intuitive and enjoyable.

For two decades, my impatience for video game yardage has prompted me to call an inordinate number of pass plays. This control adjustment has fixed that.

Another welcome improvement is GameFlow, which allows gamers to play a football game while leaving the coaching to others. It's far superior than the previous "Ask Madden" method.

Just click a single button and a suitable play for the situation is called. A coach calls the strategy into your helmet's headset (the main speakers or your Xbox 360 headset) and you just run the play.

Sure, the artificial intelligence play callers are going to make some puzzling decisions, but so do real-life offensive and defensive coordinators. And gamers who really want control are going to pick their own plays.

Even with GameFlow, you can always opt to select from the full playbook or call an audible at the line, and more extensive pre-game adjustments can be made in the Game Planning menu. Just bump and drop the popularity of certain plays in particular situations in a process like rating songs for a customized online radio station.

The visuals in "Madden NFL 11" pop off the screen.

Coaches and players look more like their real-life counterparts, and the sun and halogen beams entering the stadiums create more realistic shadows and lighting effects.

"Madden" expanded its pre-game cut scenes with shots of players sitting in locker rooms, stars in suits walking off team buses and fans lining up to grab a beer or hot dog.

On the field, players engage in those now overly filmed get-psyched pre-game bounce sessions, defensive players jump each other to celebrate a beastly hit and coaching assistants give a player some Gatorade during timeouts.

The stadiums look great, and graphical improvements with both the sidelines and crowds are evident. Fans wear a variety of NFL gear, but the collective crowd's color palette is exclusively matched to the

teams' palette. Would an occasional random yellow or red shirt at a Colts-Eagles game hurt anyone?

Crowds engage in team specific chants such as "J-E-T-S Jets," "Go Pack Go" and "Tampa ... Bay." I've been waiting for the latter for 20 years.

Other in-game improvements include better downfield blocking and refinements to many of the catching and running animations.

Where the game really falls short is in the play-by-play announcing.

In an attempt to boost the broadcast excitement level, EA Sports hired Gus Johnson, a top-notch veteran announcer who does a fantastic job on Sundays.

But his game calling comes through here as ridiculously fragmented and choppy, as the voice inflections in strung-together phrases are way too diverse.

A loud and excited "Braylon Edwards" is followed by a subdued "making his first reception of the game." Excitement builds with a boisterous, "He's wanting to go deep with it," followed by a way softer, "He's taken down at the 20," without ever noting that it was a catch. It's just not natural.

I got so fed up with this that I decided to turn off the commentary, which revealed another sound issue I had been overlooking. I could hear no stadium announcer chronicling the play, ball carrier, tackler and yardage. The odd thing is a specific volume control setting for the stadium speakers that says it scales the volume of the PA announcer. Confusing.

On the positive side, Cris Collinsworth's color commentary is solid and unbutchered, as his bits are recorded in full sentences.

One new multiplayer offering this year is online team play, which allows three-on-three action with one controlling the quarterback, one handling the running backs and the third guiding the receivers. This is a nice addition.

All-in-all, "Madden NFL 11" is once again the best NFL football video game on the market, and that's not just because it's the only NFL football video game on the market.

Fans of the series commit to buying a new title each year, and there are not enough reasons to skip this year.

Three-and-a-half out of four stars.

#### Irrational Games Prepping 'Bioshock Infinite'

2K Games revealed Wednesday that its Irrational Games studio is currently developing the next installment in the "BioShock" franchise, dubbed "BioShock Infinite."

The game, which is being developed for the Xbox 360, the PlayStation3, and Games for Windows, is expected to hit stores sometime in 2012.

The game is set in 1912 where a man is on a mission to rescue a woman from Columbia, a city in the sky.

A trailer for "BioShock Infinite" transported users to Columbia, where we assume the role of former Pinkerton agent Booker DeWitt, and must rescue Elizabeth, a young woman imprisoned there since childhood. From a first person point of view, we see that DeWitt is being brutally attacked by a Big Daddy. He is soon thrown from his sanctuary in the sky and begins to fall. A woman saves him briefly, but not before she is grabbed by the rebellious Big Daddy.

"In order to explore the floating city of Columbia, we needed an entirely new engine. To bring Elizabeth to life, we had to build brand-new animation and AI systems," Ken Levine, creative director of Irrational Games, said in a statement. "To create wide-ranging indoor and outdoor firefights at 30,000 feet, we had to rethink, rebuild, and expand the BioShock arsenal. The only thing gamers can be certain of is this: the rules of the BioShock universe are about to change."

Rage Set to Release in September of 2011

After debuting gameplay footage at E3, id's Rage quickly jumped to the top of the list of 'most-anticipated' titles. Besides just looking fairly incredible, and besides the impressive pedigree of id Software and publisher Bethesda, Rage also will debut the brand new id Tech 5 engine.

Originally debuted at Quakecon 2007, Rage has had the industry's attention for quite awhile. Besides the fact that the company that created the first-person shooter genre is releasing a new game, the proprietary engine that they created for this game is also attracting developers who have been using id's software engines for years.

As more footage of Rage is released, it will soon have the attention of gamers everywhere as well, but we will have to wait until September 13 of next year to experience the results of id's newest creation.

Set in a post-apocalyptic wasteland, the first-person shooter takes place on an Earth devastated by an asteroid. Beyond that, not much is known, but expect to hear more in the coming months.

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A-ONE's Headline News  
The Latest in Computer Technology News  
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Verizon, Google Outline Vision on Internet Yraffic

Phone and cable TV companies that provide Internet access should be barred



from slowing down, blocking or charging to prioritize Internet traffic flowing over their regular broadband lines, Verizon Communications Inc. and Google Inc. said in a policy statement released Monday.

But the companies left room for broadband providers to charge extra to route traffic from premium services such as remote medical monitoring and smart-grid controls over dedicated networks that are separate from the public Internet.

Verizon and Google laid out their vision in a policy proposal that they hope can serve as a framework for Congress and the Federal Communications Commission in drafting so-called "network neutrality" rules. Such rules are meant to ensure that phone and cable providers cannot favor their own services or discriminate against Internet phone calls, online video and other Web services that compete with their core businesses.

Although broadband providers such as Verizon and Internet-content companies such as Google are at opposite ends in the increasingly bitter debate over such rules, the two companies have been in talks for months to try to identify common ground.

Their proposal comes just days after the FCC declared an impasse in negotiations to craft an industry-wide compromise on the thorny issue. FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski is seeking to adopt net-neutrality rules that would ensure that broadband subscribers could readily access all legal online content, applications, services and devices.

The proposal from Google and Verizon would give the FCC authority to enforce those rules for wired networks by prohibiting broadband providers from discriminating against or favoring Internet traffic. The proposal would allow the agency to impose a penalty of up to \$2 million on companies that violate the rules. Wireless carriers, which have more capacity constraints, would not be subject to the restrictions, although they would have to disclose their network management practices.

In a conference call with reporters, Google CEO Eric Schmidt and Verizon CEO Ivan Seidenberg said their proposal would preserve the openness of the Internet, but still give phone and cable TV companies room to experiment with "managed" services that could send video, games and other bandwidth-hungry applications over separate systems.

Jen Howard, a spokeswoman for Genachowski, had no comment.

But several public interest groups were quick to denounce the proposal. In a statement, Free Press Political Adviser Joel Kelsey said the plan would "transform the free and open Internet into a closed platform like cable television" and "lead to toll booths on the information superhighway."

Gigi B. Sohn, president and co-founder of the group Public Knowledge, added that the proposal "sacrifices the future of the mobile wireless Internet as this platform becomes more central to the lives of all Americans."

Public interest groups were particularly disappointed with Google, which has led the push in recent years for strict net neutrality rules that would require broadband providers to give equal treatment to Internet traffic. Net neutrality supporters argue that this encompasses more than just barring phone and cable companies from blocking or degrading traffic.

They also insist that broadband providers should not be able to charge extra for priority access on their systems because doing so would create a two-tiered Internet with a fast lane for online companies that can pay more and a slow lane for everyone else. The proposal outlined by Verizon and Google, they say, violates this principle.

But Schmidt rejected this point, stressing that the proposal would not allow any paid prioritization of traffic over the public Internet.

"Google cares a lot about the open Internet," he said. "The open Internet made it possible for our two founders ... to turn a very powerful idea into this phenomenal business that Google represents today."

Verizon and other Internet providers, meanwhile, maintain that onerous net neutrality rules would discourage them from continuing to invest in their systems. After spending billions to upgrade their lines for broadband, they say, they should be able to operate those systems as they see fit and earn a healthy return by offering premium services.

Broadband providers also insist that they need flexibility to manage traffic so that high-bandwidth applications don't hog capacity and slow down their networks for everyone else.

#### Google-Verizon Net Neutrality Plan Exempts Wireless

Following a rash of rumors in the last week about what they were discussing, Google and Verizon Wireless on Monday unveiled a joint policy proposal for Net neutrality. Under the proposal, a broadband provider can prioritize some kinds of online content to willing customers, wireline Internet remains neutral as to content, and wireless is unregulated.

In a joint statement posted simultaneously with the opening of a press conference by Google CEO Eric Schmidt and Verizon CEO Ivan Seidenberg, the two companies said it is "imperative that we find ways to protect the future openness of the Internet and encourage the rapid deployment of broadband." Schmidt noted that the announcement was about a "joint policy," not a business arrangement.

The companies said their "principled compromise" is guided by two main goals - allowing users to choose content, applications and devices, and encouraging investment and innovation in the broadband infrastructure.

Those are the twin, opposing arguments about Net neutrality - that users need access to any Net content, without some content being prioritized or charged at the carrier's whim, while carriers want to ensure that they have the financial resources to continue building a broadband infrastructure that can handle increasing volumes of traffic.

In the Verizon-Google Legislative Framework Proposal laid out Monday, wireline Internet service providers would be prohibited from preventing customers from sending or receiving any lawful content, running lawful applications, or connecting any lawful device.

Broadband providers would be required to be transparent about their conditions, and to disclose "in plain language" the nature of their

offerings. The framework states, however, that providers are permitted to engage in "reasonable network management" to reduce network congestion, ensure security, or ensure "service quality to a subscriber" according to best practices by an unnamed, "widely recognized Internet community governance initiative or standard-setting organization."

The framework also says a provider offering broadband Internet service consistent with the above principles could also offer "additional or differentiated services" that could "include traffic prioritization." Google and Verizon said these could include real-time medical telecommunications, a smart grid, or new gaming services - but a clear distinction between the additional, prioritized services and the open Internet was not drawn. For instance, could the prioritized services include Google's YouTube videos? Schmidt said Google's services would remain in the open Internet.

To address this issue, the framework asks that the Federal Communications Commission publish an annual report on the "effect of these additional services, and immediately report if it finds at any time that these services" threaten the provision of an open Internet. The agreement says the FCC would enforce consumer protection and nondiscrimination requirements on a "case-by-case" basis - without rule-making authority over this framework - and could issue a fine of up to \$2 million for "knowing violations."

Off the table in the framework are wireless broadband services, which the companies say is because the industry is "still developing." Only the transparency principle would apply to wireless, and the U.S. Government Accountability Office would issue an annual report on the "development and robustness of wireless broadband Internet access services." No enforcement provisions are specified.

Given Google's leading position in the community backing an open Internet, the reaction of consumer advocates to the proposal could help or hurt its reputation. Media Access Project's Andrew Jay Schwartzman told The New York Times that the "plan raises as many questions as it answers." He noted it did not disclose a standard for resolving consumer complaints, and he said the proposal that nondiscrimination of content would not apply to wireless makes "this arrangement a nonstarter."

#### Google-Verizon Net Neutrality Pact: 5 Red Flags

Google and Verizon unveiled a proposal to maintain an open Internet while creating room for a broadband network of premium services. The proposal has no legal standing whatsoever, and is basically a policy paper on network neutrality for consideration by Congress and the Federal Communications Commission. Network neutrality is the principle that broadband providers should not be allowed to discriminate or restrict Web traffic based on its content.

Regardless of the legal standing, this proposal is backed by two major technology corporations involved in the network neutrality debate. That means the proposal could influence discussions about the future of broadband Internet access in the U.S.

So far, reaction to the proposal has been highly critical. Citizen interest group Public Knowledge said the proposal "shouldn't form the basis of

legislation in Congress or of rules by the FCC." The headline "Google Goes 'Evil'" lead the Huffington Post's coverage of the proposal.

FCC Commission Michael J. Copps believes the Google-Verizon proposal is a call for the FCC to assert "authority over broadband telecommunications. (PDF)" to protect the interests of users. While Paul Misener, Amazon's vice president for global public policy, told The New York Times the Google-Verizon proposal "appears to condone services that could harm consumer Internet access."

There are many concerns and questions surrounding the Google-Verizon proposal. Here are five things that are top of my mind.

Verizon, and presumably other broadband providers, want the right to maintain a so-called private Internet to provide new services that don't exist yet. Some examples of what private broadband services could be include health care monitoring, educational services, gaming and other forms of entertainment. This private service would be separate from the regular Internet.

In theory, this sounds like a fair idea since a carrier's private network wouldn't infringe on the existing Internet we have today. But how would this play out in practice?

Would Verizon, for example, be able to tell Blizzard Entertainment - the company behind online games like World of Warcraft - that its services must be on the private network because it takes up too much bandwidth on the regular Internet?

Are there other, less direct ways broadband providers could pressure online companies to move to the private network?

By all accounts, wireless Internet (3G and Edge cellular service) is the fastest-growing means for accessing the Internet. So why does the Google-Verizon proposal leave wireless access out of the network neutrality debate? The proposal says the wireless industry is too "competitive and changing rapidly" to be included in any net neutrality agreement.

But if safeguards aren't put in place now, what happens when wireless access becomes the dominant way to access the Internet? In fact, that future may be here sooner than you think. A recent study by Morgan Stanley predicts more people will be getting online via mobile devices than PCs within 5 years. What happens to network neutrality then?

The Google-Verizon proposal says broadband providers "would not be able to discriminate against or prioritize lawful Internet content." I have to wonder if by "lawful Internet content" what these two companies really mean is "any content but torrents," also known as peer-to-peer (p2p) file sharing.

It's no secret that broadband carriers have a grudge against p2p file sharing and wouldn't mind if it disappeared. Vuze, a company that makes p2p software, has claimed in the past that all U.S. broadband carriers disrupt p2p traffic. Broadband carrier Comcast has battled against file sharing in recent years claiming the file sharing protocol slows down the network for all users.

It's also no secret that many users on p2p networks are trading copyrighted files such as major Hollywood movies, TV shows, video games, music and even digital scans of comic books.

But p2p can be used for legitimate purposes as well. Activist group the Yes Men recently released their documentary "The Yes Men Fix the World" as a publicly available torrent file. Michael Moore did the same thing for "Slacker Uprising" in 2008, and the CBC (Canada's public broadcaster) has also experimented with distributing content via torrents.

For all the criticism and bad press it gets, torrent protocols are an efficient and useful way to distribute content (legal or otherwise). So how would the Google-Verizon proposal effect p2p file sharing? Would access to sites like The Pirate Bay or other torrent databases be restricted based on accusations that most of the content it points to isn't "lawful"? Also, how deeply would broadband carriers be monitoring p2p traffic to watch out for unlawful content on their networks?

The Google-Verizon proposal appears to make room for a two-tiered Internet: the public Internet we use today and a private one for premium services. That raises the question about what happens to the regular Internet in the long term? Would broadband providers be compelled to maintain and upgrade their regular Internet services? Could carriers cap regular Internet speeds at a certain level, and then force users over to the proposed private service if they wanted better broadband speeds? How does an open or so-called public Internet survive when corporations have financial incentives, such as private networks, to ignore it?

Finally, how much is this going to cost the regular end user? If this proposed framework succeeds and carriers are able to offer private services, what are the costs going to be? Would fees be structured like cable packages, as some reports have suggested, where you buy one plan for entertainment services like gaming and another for services like health care monitoring? Or would services be provided a la carte, where you just pay for the access you want?

The aim of the Verizon-Google plan is to maintain an open Internet and for "continued investment in broadband infrastructure." But is a proposed two-tiered broadband system that ignores the growing popularity of wireless access really a good way to maintain open Internet access for all? I'm not so sure.

### Net Neutrality: Reading Between the Google-Verizon Lines

Google and Verizon unveiled a joint proposal advocating net neutrality - sort of. When net neutrality opponents band together to embrace the concept, it's prudent to pull back the curtain and look more closely at the details and motives behind the plan.

The New York Times may have been off the mark in prematurely reporting that Google and Verizon were double-crossing the ongoing FCC net neutrality negotiations with secret back-room deals. However, the reports may actually have been more truth than fiction because ultimately the two parties emerged from those secret meetings with a self-serving plan that sabotages those efforts.

Let's use an analogy. Assume that the FCC called a meeting to declare pizza the best food ever. Then Google and Verizon meet on the side and call a press conference to declare that pizza is, in fact, the best food ever. Awesome! We all agree. Right? Well, when you look at the details,

Google and Verizon are declaring pizza the best food ever as long as it doesn't have pepperoni and it is only eaten indoors while sitting on folding chairs. All other scenarios are still open to interpretation.

If Google and Verizon are in favor of net neutrality, why not simply get on board with the FCC plan? The more important questions are: "Why is the FCC asking the industry it is tasked with regulating what the regulations should look like?" or "Why should we let the fox propose a plan for protecting the hen house?".

Involving Verizon, Comcast, and other broadband Internet providers - wired or wireless - is like inviting Al Qaeda, North Korea, and Iran to work out a plan for defending the nation, or inviting BP, Exxon-Mobil, and Shell to work out details to protect our environment from the perils of offshore drilling. We have government agencies that are supposed to manage these activities. Negotiating a compromise with the industry that is supposed to be regulated violates the agency's responsibility to the nation.

FCC chairman Julius Genachowski and the rest of the FCC should be ashamed that they chose political expediency over the best interests of the nation by calling the net neutrality negotiations in the first place. Doing what's right is rarely popular, and the FCC definitely shouldn't expect the industry to welcome oversight with open arms.

The FCC has a job to do. That job is to regulate and oversee communications by radio, television, wire, satellite and cable. It doesn't need additional authority from Congress to execute those duties, and it doesn't need the permission or cooperation of the parties it is tasked with overseeing.

The Google-Verizon "net neutrality" plan is a thinly - and poorly - veiled attempt to appear to embrace the principles of net neutrality while not-so-secretly laying the groundwork for doing the exact opposite. Google and Verizon have a profit motive and a fiduciary obligation to their shareholders. They would fail in their obligations if they didn't do everything possible to minimize regulation and maximize profit.

Profit motive and corporate greed are a conflict of interest for doing what's right. The FCC, and the nation, should read between the lines and reject the Google-Verizon proposal out of hand.

### Net Neutrality Advocates Blast Google, Verizon Plan

Net neutrality advocates claim Google and Verizon's joint policy proposal for an "open Internet" will do more harm than good when it comes to keeping networks as open to all data. Critics claim the proposal is "worse than feared" and if adopted will result in users paying premium rates to access content such as critical health care services and access to online gaming platforms.

In a press conference Monday the two Internet giants detailed a plan that would require all broadband connections to be content neutral, preventing service providers from blocking or degrading Web traffic. While on the surface the proposal looks like Google and Verizon are looking out for the best interests of the Internet as a whole, many feel that the companies have a hidden agenda.

The biggest sore spot identified by leading net neutrality experts

centers on Google and Verizon's notion that some Internet traffic should be treated differently than other types of traffic. Things such as "advanced educational services, or new entertainment and gaming options" Google and Verizon argue these services should get preferential treatment. Many see this as Google and Verizon attempting to take steps to create a pay-to-play tier of higher bandwidth and more reliable Internet service. The end result might be either content providers or consumers will have to pay more for access to a premium version of the Internet.

Sherwin Sly, Deputy Legal Director of Public Knowledge, a Washington DC based public interest group concerned with digital culture, criticized the idea that Verizon and Google would make a proposal in the first place: "The agreement outsources the FCC's powers and authorities to the very industries these rules are supposed to oversee." Having Verizon and Google make rules about the Web is comparable to having Ford or GM makes rules about auto safety. Public Knowledge has issued a petition on its site to the FCC calling it to "take action now to protect innovation, competition and American broadband consumers" and not allow broadband companies to make rules of their own.

Free Press, a nonprofit organization working to reform the media, issued a statement calling the proposal "worse than feared" and urging policy makers to reject what they call "fake net neutrality." The Free Press says that the framework of the proposal "opens the door wide open for ISPs and deep-pocketed content companies to engage in practices that will turn the Internet platform into something that more closely resembles the closed cable TV model."

While Free Press say the proposal is disguised "as a reasonable path forward" it feels that if adopted the path will instead "lead to toll booths on the information superhighway" where users have to pay to get to get to "premium" content they want to see. "The Google-Verizon pact isn't just as bad as we feared - it's much worse. They are attacking the Internet while claiming to preserve it. Google users won't be fooled."

Adam Green, co-founder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee, suggests that traditional broadband connections will be obsolete in a few years and that the "transparency rules" suggested in the proposal for wireless carriers will simply allow Americans to "visibly watch" free and open Internet disappear.

Green also suggests that Verizon's large investment in broadband may be a motive for it to keep it alive in a world where wireless is quickly taking over. If only broadband Internet is open, it would stand to reason that more people would in turn want broadband.

Green's committee has started an emergency online petition to Google simply titled "Don't be evil - stand up for the free and open Internet." The petition has currently been signed by more than 300,000 people and contains an open letter to the company:

Dear Google,

As a Google user, I am telling you, 'Don't be evil.' The deal between Google and Verizon is evil, because it threatens the open Internet, which hundreds of millions of people rely on every day. Live up to your founding motto, walk away from this deal and save the Internet.

Sincerely,

[Add your name]

FCC Commissioner Michael Copps posted the following statement on the FCC Website: "Some will claim this announcement moves the discussion forward. That's one of its many problems. It is time to move a decision forward - a decision to reassert FCC authority over broadband telecommunications, to guarantee an open Internet now and forever, and to put the interests of consumers in front of the interests of giant corporations."

### Understanding Verizon, Google, and Net Neutrality

The Valley hubbub today is all about the antics of two of its most powerful titans: Google and Verizon - and a plan they've floated around the idea of net neutrality, the long-simmering idea that would protect popular online sites and services from being charged extra by ISPs and data carriers, and in turn would ensure that consumers don't have to pay extra to access those sites.

On Monday, Google and Verizon put forward a "joint policy proposal" for their vision of an open Internet. The online posting expands upon the two companies' "statement of principles" released late last year.

Many of the ideas put forward - seven points are outlined in all - are innocuous, including notions about enforcing anti-discriminatory practices, disallowing prioritization and blocking of Internet traffic. But its ideas No. 5 and 6, almost thrown out casually, that have people all in a tizzy.

Here's why.

Suggestion 5 suggests that while the "regular" Internet should be subject to all the rules preventing discrimination of Web traffic and the like, companies should be allowed to build "additional, differentiated online services" in addition to the ones offered today. While the Google post goes to great lengths to suggest this is not a way to circumvent the rules, the prospect of having to deal with (and pay for) a second (or third or fourth) Internet is daunting. More troubling: The standard rules would not apply on this shadow Internet, leaving companies free to develop their own services that did not fall under FCC rules, creating a free-for-all that could be an outright nightmare for users - and an expensive one at that.

Think of it this way: If Google and Verizon had their way, you could be paying for standard Web service, Web video, Skype, online gaming, and even email all separately, because they could all be "differentiated" enough to merit special treatment.

Suggestion No. 6 is easier to understand. Verizon and Google recognize that the future isn't really in copper and fiber being piped into our house, but in wireless. They want special rules for the wireless world, and the suggestion is that virtually none of the net neutrality suggestions would apply if a cell phone or radio were involved. That's scary.

While everyone's up in arms, it is important to remember that Google and Verizon - while powerful - have no policy-making ability in Washington, and their suggestions are exactly that: Ideas that are good for Google



and Verizon, and perhaps not so much for the rest of the world. In fact, the FCC has already expressed some dismay with the bloviating, suggesting that it is more interested in protecting consumers than the coffers of two tech titans.

### Google-Verizon Pact Proves Need for Real Net Neutrality

The Internet is abuzz with reports that the sky is falling and the end is near following the Google-Verizon proposal for "net neutrality". On the contrary, Google and Verizon did the Internet a huge favor by demonstrating exactly why net neutrality is necessary, and creating a backlash strong enough to drive Congress and the FCC to do the right thing.

Throughout the struggle for net neutrality, the major Internet industry players that oppose the concept have ironically been the major catalysts proving just how much a written regulatory framework for net neutrality is needed. Comcast, AT&T, and now Google and Verizon continue to do their cause more harm than good.

Comcast drew first blood in the net neutrality battle by violating the principles of the Broadband Policy Statement established by the FCC in 2005. Intentionally choking peer-to-peer networking traffic, and giving other Internet traffic preferential treatment on the Comcast network drew attention to the cause and illustrated why the FCC should have stronger oversight to protect national and consumer interests.

Last fall, AT&T reversed its policy banning VoIP (Voice over IP) apps from using its 3G wireless network. The rejection of the Google Voice app, and the restriction of the Skype app to only Wi-Fi demonstrated that an unregulated broadband industry will act out of greed and self-interest - closing out competition and stifling innovation.

AT&T trumpeted the move as evidence of how well the industry polices itself and why net neutrality is unnecessary, but the reality is that the specter of net neutrality is what drove AT&T to reverse its policy. Had there not been an ongoing debate and threat of regulatory oversight, AT&T would have been happy to continue restricting access to its network.

Now, Google and Verizon come along like wolves in sheep's clothing - developing a proposal to very narrowly define net neutrality, and with enough built-in intricacy and double-speak to leave the door wide open for industry players to interpret net neutrality to fit their needs. Putting "net neutrality" lipstick on that pig didn't really fool anyone, though, and ultimately Google and Verizon helped the FCC cause for real net neutrality and did the general public a favor by proving why it's needed.

If net neutrality were a game of chess, though, the industry players may have outwitted the FCC and dodged increased regulatory oversight of wired and wireless broadband simply by dragging things out. If the Republicans win back seats during the mid-term election - as is widely expected - corporations with deep pockets will have more friends in Congress and the FCC will have a more difficult time making the case for doing the job it was chartered to do.

The FCC Notice of Inquiry (NOI) seeking public comment and feedback on reclassifying broadband service to increase FCC oversight ends tomorrow -

August 12. The FCC should ignore the Google-Verizon proposal, and forget about negotiating the future of the Internet with companies that stand to gain the most from an unregulated Internet, and simply march forth based on the wisdom and insight gathered during the NOI process.

### Google Insists It Didn't 'Sell Out' with Net Neutrality Plan

Amid a storm of opposition from consumer groups and some Internet-based companies for its joint proposal with Verizon Wireless on how to handle Net neutrality, Google is now defending its position. On Thursday, the search giant sought to shoot down what it described as six "myths" about the proposal.

"On balance," the statement on the official Google Blog said, "we believe this proposal represents real progress on what has become a very contentious issue." The statement was posted by Richard Whitt, Washington telecom and media counsel for the company.

The first myth, the company said, is that it has "sold out" on Net neutrality. On the contrary, the company said, it has been "the leading corporate voice" on this issue over the past five years. It noted that there currently are "no enforceable protections" at the Federal Communications Commission or elsewhere against the "worst forms of carrier discrimination against Internet traffic."

In that climate, Google said, it decided to "partner with a major broadband provider on the best policy solution we could," one that is not perfect but that "locks in key enforceable protections for consumers."

The second myth cited is that the proposal is a "step backward" for an open Internet. Whitt said the proposal would give the FCC the ability to preserve an open Internet for the first time, although the agency would be prohibited from imposing regulations. Some observers have noted that the proposal appeared to confine the FCC to answering consumer complaints and filing observational reports.

Another myth, Google said, is that the proposal would eliminate network neutrality for wireless. Google said "in the spirit of compromise" it agreed to allow wireless to remain "free from regulation" for now. The company acknowledged that it had previously argued that "certain openness safeguards" be applied to wireless as well as wireline.

The reason behind the exception for wireless, Whitt wrote, is because it is a heavily competitive environment, often with two or more service providers available to every customer, and there is limited capacity because there is limited over-the-air bandwidth.

One of the biggest red flags to consumer groups and various Net companies is that the proposal seeks to let providers offer specialized services to customers outside of the "regular Internet." These could be special gaming services, banking or medical telecommunications, although, as many observers have noted, the differences between these services and the Internet were not made clear.

Google countered that it included "key protections" in the proposal to shield the public Internet, including full compliance by providers with consumer protections and nondiscrimination standards before the

specialized services could be offered. Also included, it said, is a distinction "in purpose and scope" of these services so that they do not replace the "best effort Internet," and the ability of the FCC to monitor the offers and intervene in some unspecified way, if needed.

Google dismissed the idea that it's working with Verizon because of its partnership with that company to promote Android-based devices. It also argued that the proposal is not two big companies "legislating the future of the Internet," but simply two companies offering a "legislative framework" to Congress for consideration, with the hope that others will weigh in.

#### FTC Halts Domain-Name Registration Scam

A U.S. judge has ordered a halt to a Canadian operation that allegedly posed as a domain-name registrar in an effort to collect fees from thousands of U.S. consumers, small businesses and nonprofits, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission said.

Judge Robert Dow Jr. of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division, has ordered defendant Steven Dale to pay nearly US\$4.3 million in a default judgment the FTC released Monday. Dow issued a settlement order for a Toronto business and three other individuals in the lawsuit brought by the FTC in May 2008, the agency announced.

Dow issued the settlement order and default judgment in March, but the documents were made public Monday.

The FTC had accused a business called 1646153 Ontario of sending fake domain-name invoices to small businesses and other organizations, with the letters listing the existing domain name of the targeted firm's website or a slight variation on the domain name, such as substituting.org for .com. The invoices appeared to come from the targeted organizations' existing domain-name registrars and instructed them to pay for an annual "website address listing."

The invoices also listed search engine optimization as part of the service from 1646153 Ontario, which did business under several names, including Internet Listing Service.

The invoices led the targeted customers to believe they had to pay the fees to maintain their domain-name registrations, the FTC said in a press release. Other customers paid the invoices based on the claim that the search optimization service would "direct mass traffic" to their sites and that their "proven search engine listing service" would result in "a substantial increase in traffic," the FTC press release said.

Targeted customers who paid the invoices did not receive domain-name registration services, and the search optimization service did not produce additional traffic for their websites, the FTC said in its complaint.

Dow issued a temporary restraining order against several of the defendants in May 2008. The settlement order and default judgment released Monday end the FTC's lawsuit.

The orders bar the defendants from misrepresenting that they have a preexisting business relationship with consumers, and that consumers owe them money. The orders also prohibit the defendants from saying they will provide domain name registration and search optimization services.

The settlement order, entered against defendants Isaac Benlolo, Kirk Mulveney, Pearl Keslassy and 1646153 Ontario, includes a suspended judgment of \$4.3 million, the amount of money the defendants made through the operation. They will turn over \$10,000, based on their inability to pay more, the FTC said.

Charges against Ari Balabanian and Data Business Solutions were dismissed by the court at the FTC's request.

### Craigslist Asked To Shut Down 'Adult Services' Section

Craigslist came under fire again Monday when a human rights group took out an ad that detailed the ordeals of two women it described as survivors of Craigslist sex trafficking, and asked the site to shut down its adult services section.

In a blog post response, Craigslist co-founder Jim Buckmaster expressed concern about whether or not the perpetrators had been arrested, but said that "criminal misuse of the site is quite rare."

The ad, which was funded by the FAIR Fund and formatted as a letter to Craigslist co-founder Craig Newmark, discussed the abduction and forced prostitution of two women who identified themselves as AK and MC. It was published in The Washington Post and The San Francisco Chronicle.

AK said she met a man in 2009 who pretended to be her boyfriend but soon revealed he was a pimp. "He put my picture on Craigslist, and I was sold for sex by the hour at truck stops and cheap motels, 10 hours with 10 different men every night," AK wrote.

MC said she was forced into prostitution six years ago at age 11 by a 28-year-old man.

"All day, me and other girls sat with our laptops, posting pictures and answering ads on Craigslist," MC wrote. "He made \$1,500 a night selling my body, dragging me to Los Angeles, Houston, Little Rock; and one trip to Las Vegas in the trunk of a car."

The women said that Craigslist is the Web site of choice for traffickers because "it's so well known and there are rarely consequences to using it for these illegal acts." They asked that the site shut down its adult services section.

In his response, Buckmaster asked if the perpetrators were behind bars.

"If Craigslist was misused, we want to learn more so we can improve our preventative measures," he wrote. "If anyone committing such crimes has not yet been apprehended and prosecuted, we want to do everything in our power to assist the police in making that happen."

He asked them to provide any information about the men to Craigslist's legal department.

Still, incidents described by AK and MC are a rarity, he said.

"Craigslist is used by more than 50 million Americans to facilitate billions of interactions each month, and criminal misuse of the site is quite rare," Buckmaster wrote. "We are dedicated to eliminating it entirely however, and in this regard we have been working for years to ensure that Craigslist is very much part of the solution to crimes such as trafficking and exploitation of minors."

Craigslist made headlines last year after a man was arrested for allegedly murdering a girl he encountered on Craigslist, spawning the "Craigslist killer" moniker. Craigslist denied that the site was used for nefarious purposes, but amidst pressure from various state attorneys general, it agreed in May 2009 to ditch its "Erotic Services" section in favor of a monitored "Adult Services" section. All posts to that section are reviewed by Craigslist staff and cost \$10 per ad.

Buckmaster suggested that MK and AC might have been victimized before Craigslist switched to the stricter "Adult Services" model. It appears that MC was trafficked in the 2004 time period; AC mentioned 2009, but did not specify a particular month.

"Craigslist is one of the few bright spots and success stories in the critical fight against trafficking and child exploitation," Buckmaster said. "We've been told as much by experts on the front lines, many of whom we have met with in person, and many of whom have shared helpful suggestions we have incorporated in our approach."

In May 2010, Connecticut's attorney general, Richard Blumenthal, issued a subpoena to Craigslist, asking the site to turn over evidence that it is fulfilling its promise to get rid of ads for prostitution and other illegal activity, as well as data on what it earns from adult ads.

Craigslist has had a rather icy relationship with Blumenthal, who is currently running for the Senate seat being vacated by retiring Sen. Chris Dodd. When the subpoena was issued, Buckmaster accused Blumenthal of political maneuvering, and he appeared to get in another dig at Blumenthal in Monday's blog post.

"Even politicians looking to advance their careers by publicly criticizing us grudgingly admit (when pressed) that we have made giant strides, and that Craigslist is virtually alone among advertising venues in vigorously combating exploitation and trafficking," Buckmaster wrote.

#### Malware Call to Arms: Threat at All-Time High and Rising

McAfee recently published its McAfee Threat Report: Second Quarter 2010 revealing a variety of interesting and relevant details about the current state of the malware threat. The McAfee report contains cause for concern and demonstrates why it's more important than ever that organizations not let their computer and network security guard down.

other portable storage devices, and social networking services, and they are increasingly skilled at camouflaging attacks behind stories ripped from the headlines to draw the most attention from gullible users.

"Our latest threat report depicts that malware has been on a steady incline in the first half of 2010," said Mike Gallagher, senior vice president and chief technology officer of Global Threat Intelligence for McAfee in a McAfee press release. "It's also obvious that cybercriminals are becoming more in tune with what the general public is passionate about from a technology perspective and using it to lure unsuspecting victims. These findings indicate that not only should cybercrime education be more widespread, but that security organizations should move from a reactive to a predictive security strategy."

To aid IT admins and information security professionals embrace "offensive security", McAfee dedicated the latest issue of the McAfee Security Journal to addressing the concept. McAfee sees the writing on the wall, and it is issuing a call to arms for the security industry to get proactive rather than playing the victim.

"Cybercriminals prosper because they have very little reason to fear the consequences," said Jeff Green, senior vice president of McAfee Labs. "As security experts, it's time to take a hard look at what we do, how we do it, and what our ultimate goals are. The tools and techniques of cybercrime continue to grow in number and sophistication at alarming rates. Every time we release a new statistic about the rise in malware it points to our failure as an industry."

The McAfee Security Journal contains prescriptive guidance directing organizations to use common hacker techniques to test their own software and Web sites before the bad guys do. McAfee also urges security professionals to cooperate more - sharing relevant information and working together to take down major security threats.

"As we look at the evolution of risky domains and Web sites over multiple years, we can't avoid the conclusion that the risk keeps increasing in both volume and sophistication," said David Marcus, director of security research and communications for McAfee Labs. "If we want to stop being victims, then the good guys need to advance security efforts as threats evolve."

Malware developers are adept at exploiting emerging technologies and staying one step ahead of attempts to thwart them. The reactive model of scanning based on malware signatures is out of date and ready to collapse under the weight of the sheer volume of malware threats. It's time for a new strategy, and McAfee seems to have the right idea.

#### Dell To Sell Tablet for \$300 with AT&T Contract

Dell Inc will begin selling its new tablet device called the Dell Streak to U.S. customers later this week for \$299.99 with a two-year AT&T Inc. contract, and for \$549.99 without, it said on Tuesday.

Dell said it would begin taking orders online on Thursday.

The company is hoping the five-inch tablet, which runs on Google Inc's Android operating system, will help it take on Apple Inc's iPad.

Best Buy appears to be working on its own rebranded tablet, according to the company's chief technology officer.

On August 4, Robert Stevens, Best Buy's chief technology officer and the founder of its Geek Squad, posted a pair of photos to his Twitter feed, one of which showed a pair of tablets.

Stevens later noted that the two tablets were just form-factor mockups. "It's just a form factor proto[type]. Not guts inside, but coming soon," he added.

Stevens later said that he had been "tweeting photos of tablets for months".

As Stevens pointed out, Best Buy manufactures the Insignia brand of devices, a line that takes third-party consumer-electronics products from other manufacturers and rebrands them under its own logo. The firm also asks third-party manufacturers to design versions of standard products for its own stores; in 2008, Best Buy launched a "Blue Label" program, its own brand for PCs. Finally, Best Buy also owns the Rocketfish brand of networking products.

#### IPad Challenger Adam's Release Getting Closer

After wowing onlookers at the Consumer Electronics Show earlier this year, the highly anticipated Adam tablet is out of the experimental phase and could become available to users soon, perhaps by the end of this year.

Bangalore-based Notion Ink, which makes the tablet, said Thursday in a blog entry that the company is aiming to submit the device to the U.S. Federal Communications Commission for certification by the second week of November.

The product's release will depend on how long the certification takes, wrote Rohan Shravan, founder of Notion Ink, in the entry.

The Adam tablet is known to be equipped with advanced hardware, including Pixel Qi's transfective display and Nvidia's fast Tegra 2 chip. The Pixel Qi display can absorb ambient light to brighten screens, which could help reduce power consumption to extend the battery life of tablets. The Tegra 2 chip gives the tablet the capability to play back full 1080p high-definition video, versus the 720p video Apple's iPad is capable of.

The tablet could be priced between US\$399 and \$498 and come in four models depending on the screen and wireless connectivity, Shravan wrote. Models will ship with either Pixel Qi or traditional LCD screens, and include Wi-Fi and/or 3G wireless connectivity.

Shravan said that launches in other countries depend on the number of developers collaborating on application development for the device. The device's profitability doesn't lie in the hardware but around its ecosystem, Shravan wrote.

"When the best hardware can be clubbed with a massive ecosystem, you are talking about a revolution," Shravan wrote.

The device will be available through an online store.

The "world is not small when it comes to shipping, but we will try to reach wherever you are," Shravan wrote.

#### Here Comes IE 9: Beta Launches September 15

Number 9...Number 9...Number 9... Okay, now that I've got the obligatory Beatles reference out of the way, Microsoft announced on its Windows Team Blog that it will launch Internet Explorer 9 at a media event in San Francisco on September 15.

Microsoft announced a "platform preview" of IE 9 back in March. The Platform Preview was basically the IE 9 rendering engine presented in a plain window - no toolbars, no extra features. IE 9 will feature better support for new Web technologies such as HTML5 and CSS3. It'll also provide hardware acceleration for rendering graphics and text on a Web page and a faster JavaScript engine for better Web app performance, among other features.

We don't yet know what the IE 9 interface will look like, or what other features it'll have, so we'll have to wait until next month for that.

#### MySpace To Revamp Site in Aim To Simplify

The once-dominant social network MySpace is revamping its home page. It's looking a little more like its more popular and populous rival, Facebook, even as it attempts to set itself apart.

In simplifying its user home page, MySpace is making users' stream wider and more prominent. The stream is the constantly updated flow of status updates and shared content, much like the news feed that is front and center in Facebook.

MySpace also is consolidating recommendations, such as games, events and "people you may know," into one section instead of scattering them around the page. And users' photos, videos, music and events will be combined under a "My Stuff" section on their home page.

The redesign is part of a broader overhaul of MySpace, as the site works to stay relevant to its current audience and draw in new users, including those who haven't visited in years.

In setting itself apart from Facebook - which in just a couple of years dethroned MySpace as a media darling and Internet favorite - MySpace is focusing on attracting younger users and helping them discover new things.

That has been the site's forte since its heyday, when teens flocked to MySpace to find out about new music and design their often flashy, jumbled home pages. Facebook, meanwhile has become especially popular with the over-35 crowd.



MySpace President Mike Jones said the latest changes are in preparation for a big overhaul in the fall, "so as we turn on the full relaunch it's not a shock to the system."

The goal is to be relevant to 13- to 34-year-olds and help them discover new people and new content.

EMarketer analyst Debra Aho Williamson called the redesign smart, a clear departure from the MySpace of old that was a "cluttered, messy catchall."

"Do I wish it happened sooner? Yes," she said.

But it didn't, and in the meantime Facebook has grown to 500 million. MySpace, which is owned by News Corp., has more than 120 million users worldwide.

"MySpace and Facebook really aren't even competing in the same category any more," Williamson said. "Which is good. For MySpace to be successful they need to carve out their own place."

MySpace remains a go-to place for many new musicians who want to showcase their music and interact with their audience. If MySpace's overhaul works, making music and entertainment front and center could help it serve the same purpose MTV did a generation ago. If it doesn't, it could go the way of another once-dominant network, Friendster.

#### Microsoft vs. Mac Redux: New Site Reignites Rivalry

Just in time for the back-to-school shopping season, tech's greatest rivalry is back. No, I'm not talking about Apple vs. Google; that's small potatoes. Long before Google launched its Android assault on Apple and its iPhone, Microsoft and Apple were publicly doing battle for supremacy in the personal computer market. And now, thanks to Microsoft's latest campaign to mock the Mac, the rivalry has been renewed.

Microsoft this week added a new "PC vs Mac" section to its Web site, which touts the advantages that Windows-based PCs have over Macs. The multi-page site, which highlights the fact that Windows-based PCs can "easily share" Microsoft Office documents and play Blu-ray discs, was launched just days after a new report suggested that Macs have become the computers of choice for incoming college students.

Forty-seven percent of college students who plan to buy a new laptop planned to buy a Mac, the report, which was published on CNN.com and based on figures from Student Monitor, a research firm that tracks higher education computer purchases. Student Monitor notes that Dell used to be the laptop brand of choice for college students, and says that in the last five years, Dell and Apple have swapped places: "In 2005, 47 percent of students buying laptops chose Dells. In 2010, 47 percent are choosing MacBooks."

These numbers can't be making anyone in Redmond happy, and it's clear they haven't escaped Microsoft's notice. The new site clearly touts Windows features designed to appeal to college-aged students, as the first topic in its itemized list of the PC's advantages is "Having Fun."

"When it's time to enjoy movies, games, and HDTV from anywhere in your home, PCs are ready to play," the new site reads. "There are some things you simply can't do out of the box with a Mac, like watch, pause, rewind, and record TV like a DVR." This section of the site also highlights the fact that "most of the world's most popular computer games aren't available for Macs."

The site then goes on to tout the simplicity of the PC, noting that they "just work." (Hey, that sounds familiar.) Only then does the site go on to talk about the "working" capabilities of the PC, highlighting its ability to easily share Office documents and give presentations. "If most of the computers in your office or school run Windows, you may find it harder to get things done with a Mac," the site notes.

Microsoft's latest attack on Apple isn't as high profile as some of the earlier salvos in this bitter rivalry. A Web site alone (there's no word on whether Microsoft plans to expand this campaign to print or TV spots) isn't going to gain the attention of Apple's "switchers" ad campaign, or its classic (but recently pulled) "I'm a Mac" ads. Nor is this site going to gain the attention of Microsoft's "laptop hunters" ads.

But maybe it doesn't need to: Windows 7 is, after all, the fastest-selling operating system in history, so Microsoft clearly is doing something right. Still, it's clear that Microsoft isn't willing to sit back and watch Apple gain any ground. That rivalry has always been fun to watch and I, for one, am glad it's back. Here's hoping this site is just the first strike of many to come.

#### Microsoft Page Aimed at Mac 'Switchers'

PCs just work, Microsoft argues in a new Web page that attempts to convince Windows users not to switch to the Mac platform.

The site contains a list of talking points, including "Having Fun," "Simplicity," "Working Hard," "Sharing," "Compatibility," and "Choice".

It's a bit of propaganda, perhaps. But Microsoft recognizes who its chief rival is, and has attacked it directly.

In the "Simplicity" section, for example, Microsoft says: "The computer that's easiest to use is typically the one you already know how to use. While some may say Macs are easy, the reality is that they can come with a learning curve. PCs running Windows 7 look and work more like the computers you're familiar with, so you can get up and running quickly."

Users might interpret other comments less favorably: "Apple's productivity suite file formats won't open in Microsoft Office on PCs," Microsoft says in its "Simplicity" section. "This can be a real hassle for Mac users sharing work documents with PC users."

#### EBay Rolling Out Shopping Rewards Program

EBay Inc. is rolling out its eBay Bucks shopping reward program to all U.S. users of its online marketplace.

The program, which had been in a limited "beta" test, gives participants a 2 percent reward on certain items they buy through eBay.com and pay for using eBay's online payment service, PayPal. The rewards are issued as quarterly gift certificates, which can be used within 30 days when using PayPal to pay for items on eBay.

Participants can get up to \$200 in eBay Bucks for each item bought on eBay, and as much as \$500 per quarter. If you bought a \$100 vintage toy, for example, you would earn \$2 in eBay Bucks toward your quarterly total.

The program's adoption marks another move by eBay to improve the shopping experience on its main site in hopes that it will attract and retain buyers and sellers - something it has been focusing on by implementing a slew of changes.

Marc Steffans, the program's senior manager, said eBay decided to expand the program beyond the test Wednesday because it noticed that participants often used their eBay Bucks very quickly after receiving them to buy other things. That's a sign participants were pleased to get rewarded for shopping, and it helps sellers, too.

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